

Yielding to Christ: Stewardship 2 8-24-08

Once while Mahatma Gandhi's train was pulling slowly out of the station, a European reporter ran up to his compartment window. "Do you have a message I can take back to my people?" he asked. It was Gandhi's day of silence, a vital respite from demanding speaking schedule, so he didn't reply. Instead, he scrawled a few words on a piece of paper and passed it to the reporter: "My life is my message".

Doubtless you've heard the phrase that you may be the only Bible some will ever get to read. Doubtless also that we are often found to be hypocrites, not living out the freedom that Christianity promises our lives. One might ask: what can we do as stewards of a Christian Life? So this morning I'd like to offer part 2 of Stewardship: personal piety, the way we behave before God. It is often true that others will observe things in us that we fail to recognize.

As people who are predisposed to grace, a prevenient grace, a grace that comes before and makes it possible to recognize our Savior's purpose for our lives, we acknowledge that we have been given an opportunity of a lifetime, in fact an eternal lifetime, but only under one condition: I must surrender all to Christ. I must hold nothing back!

I chose to begin worship with a few well known verses from the minor prophet, Micah. What does the Lord require of you? ... (justice, mercy, humility).

Micah 6:8 speaks directly to the requirements that must accompany all true worship, point-in-fact, all true lives before God. The idea is that God seeks certain characteristics of true worship from his people. Worship is a 24/7 proposition, a lifestyle. As I spoke about an attitude of gratitude last Sunday, Micah states that justice, mercy, and humility are to be the

hallmark of biblical piety or faithfulness. Bottom line, the rulers- and his audience- did not know justice, had no interest in mercy, and demonstrated no humility. There was little room for God in the people's hearts. Now many of you know the traditional wedding verses of 1 Cor. 13 that conclude with faith, hope and love, and the greatest of these is (love). **My first point today is the greatest attitude of gratitude that one can possess, before all else, is humility.**

The first statement in what we now know as the Beatitudes is "Blessed are the poor in spirit" (v. 3). From my daily friend, Oswald Chambers, this literally means 'blessed are the paupers.' The poor are everywhere, too common to notice or appreciate. The preaching of today tends to point out a person's strength of will or the beauty of his or her character—things that are easily noticed. And the statement we so often hear is, "Make a decision for Jesus Christ." This places emphasis on something our Lord never trusted. He never once asked *us* to decide for Him, but to *yield to* Him—something very different. Let me explain.

At the foundation of Christ's kingdom is the genuine loveliness of those that are ordinary. For example, 'I am truly blessed in my poverty.' If I have no strength of will and a nature without worth, then Jesus says to me, "Blessed are you, because it is through your poverty that you can enter my kingdom." We know that we cannot enter the kingdom of God by our own merit, worth, or goodness—I can only enter it as an absolute pauper (with nothing!).

Chambers goes on to say, "The true character of beauty that speaks for God is always unnoticed by the one possessing that quality. (*This is especially true for the humble*). Conscious influence is prideful and unchristian. If I wonder if I'm being any use to God, I instantly lose the beauty and the freshness of the touch of the Lord...And if I examine the outflow (of living water), I lose touch with the Lord."

Who are the people that have influenced us most? Certainly not the ones who thought they did, but those who did not even have the slightest idea that they were influencing us- *the when did we's from the Bible, you know, when did we feed, cloth, visit?* In the Christian Life, godly influence is never conscious of itself. If we are conscious of our influence, it ceases to be of God. We always know when Jesus is at work because he produces in the common something that is inspiring or holy. Isn't that the definition of a sacramental moment, when the ordinary becomes holy? This is a natural occurrence when we grow close to God.

***Now let me go one step further. Acknowledging that the best influence on us is a natural occurrence from our relationship with God, and taking into account that much of our Christian life is lived out in the company of others, I conclude that humility is a natural occurrence while in relationship with God.***

Further, this attitude will support and build up others, the Church, the Body of Christ. To do anything else, is to make conscious the evil influences of the world, to fix our attention on the corrupt of the moth and rust world. Some of you may recall that beautiful song sung by Maria Belyea friday evening, that we must fix our attention on God. Let's look at Romans 12 again, but through the eyes of Peterson:

Romans 12 (The Message): Place Your Life before God

**1-2** So here's what I want you to do, God helping you: Take your everyday, ordinary life—your sleeping, eating, going-to-work, and walking-around life—and place it before God as an offering. Embracing what God does for you is the best thing you can do for him. Don't become so well-adjusted to your culture that you fit into it without even thinking. Instead, fix your attention on God. You'll be changed from the inside out. Readily recognize what

he wants from you, and quickly respond to it. Unlike the culture around you, always dragging you down to its level of immaturity, God brings the best out of you, develops well-formed maturity in you.

3I'm speaking to you out of deep gratitude for all that God has given me, and especially as I have responsibilities in relation to you. Living then, as every one of you does, in pure grace, it's important that you not misinterpret yourselves as people who are bringing this goodness to God. No, God brings it to all to you. The only accurate way to understand ourselves is by what God is and by what he does for us, not by what we are and what we do for him.

4-6In this way we are like the various parts of a human body. Each part gets its meaning from the body as a whole, not the other way around. The body we're talking about is Christ's body of chosen people. Each of us finds our meaning and function as a part of his body.

Our meaning as a person before Christ comes from taking our proper place in the Body, becoming what we were intended to be, and doing it in natural fashion and progression. If we are to be truly humble before God, we must come without reserve and place our lives before Christ as a sacrificial offering. We come as we are. And here's the ultimate truth of grace: since we have nothing to offer God but ourselves, and believing that His grace is sufficient, then I can rightly conclude that my weakness is Christ's opportunity. Acknowledging that I am truly "poor" before God, the only thing I can rightly do is to yield to Christ.

Over the years, Christ has graciously revealed my need of Him, not once but many, many times. Through painful experience I have begun to realize that I am not strong enough to stay spiritually afloat for even a second should God withdraw His

sustaining hand. The powers and principalities are too much for me, to say nothing of my flesh. Left alone, my sinful reactions to life would destroy me. But thank God I have not been left alone. He has held me up, above the raging waters and guided me through the darkest valleys. He has loved me when I could not love myself...

My weakness forms the perfect backdrop for His strength, and informs my faith that I can do all things in Christ who strengthens me. (Ann Spangler, freely adapted)

Now back to James, but also from the Message: 4-6 You're cheating on God. If all you want is your own way, flirting with the world every chance you get, you end up enemies of God and his way. And do you suppose God doesn't care? The proverb has it that "he's a fiercely jealous lover." And what he gives in love is far better than anything else you'll find. It's common knowledge that "God goes against the willful proud; God gives grace to the willing humble."

The true wealth offered by Jesus is the abundance of God's grace. Jesus reminds his disciples to be faithful stewards of resources that ultimately belong to God. By focusing on God instead of anything earthly, one will be held forever by God. Nothing of earth has this aspect of eternity. Christians affirm the belief that people are stewards of God's gifts, freely given, freely received. Our giving protects us from being ruled by our stuff. Giving is a freeing experience. And we are led by God, in these decisions, because it is only in God that we can place eternal trust and faith.

God desires for us to live lives that are measured in our ability to give, our possessions, our wealth, our very lives, not to get. We often miss the most important relationship of all when we are trapped in our wealth. The only real relationship that lasts for an

eternity is found in the saving, grace-filled relationship of Jesus Christ. It is our life insurance.

So I'll leave you with a question to ponder: are you committed to giving your witness, prayers, presence, and financial gifts to God? If you read the fine print in God's life insurance policy, you will note that if you comply, you are covered from here to eternity.

So here's my humble suggestion as to how to proceed:

We must first acknowledge our sins, our failings, our inadequacy and then be willing to submit to God's mercy. It is only through a humbling of ourselves that we will be allowed to walk with God. "God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble." (1 Pet. 5:5.) Paul points out that it is high-mindedness (or self-righteousness) that leads to unbelief and lack of faith in the power of God (Rom. 11:20; 12:3). The humble attitude required by the Lord will make itself known in a life of prayer, repentance, study and service.

What God requires is the doing of His will. To accomplish that lofty (yet necessary) goal we must act toward God and each other according to the divine standard of righteousness; we must show everyone a compassionate warm-heartedness; and walk humbly in recognition of the absolute holiness and righteousness of God by yielding to God through obedience to God's desire and will.

There is no "Christian To Do List." It is just not that simple. And yet we know that living Christ-like is not impossible (Mt. 11:29,30). Yet we must be mindful it is a "life" and not a series of accomplishments.

Resources consulted:

*My Utmost for His Highest, August 21*, by Oswald Chambers  
*Praying the Names of Jesus, chapter 9*, by Ann Spangler  
*Money Insurance or God's Assurance, article*, by David S. Bell  
*A Commentary on the Minor Prophets, p. 214*, by H. Hailey  
*The Message*, Peterson